May 2016 No 130

ON TRACK OFF ROAD



A 100% MOMENT

Cooper Webb,
250 SX 2016 West Coast Champion

Malcolm Stewart,
250 SX 2016 East Coast Champion

Photo: Jeff Kardas




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1
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MX

Back again...

Jorge Lorenzo might be our cover shot for a sensational performance in Le Mans and ahead of perennial LorenzoLand site Mugello this weekend but Tony Cairoli should also have been in the running for page one. The thirty year old Sicilian was in fierce form in both Germany and Italy over the last fortnight to close within just 25 points of the red plate in MXGP. The spell represented his first back-to-back since Spain-UK last summer

Photo by Ray Archer




Red Bull
222

Opening up...

The strength inside? A freak crash for Marc Marquez in Le Mans but the Catalan picked up and continued to 13th place. Great shot here by CormacGP showing some parts of the factory RCV that you'd not normally be able to see; crash damage included of course

Photo by CormacGP




MICHELIN
RedBull



The only one...

Dylan Ferrandis is a special character in MXGP and can certainly never be accused of hiding his views but the Frenchman also knows his way around a racetrack and his first MX2 moto victory last weekend in Italy was significant for breaking Red Bull KTM's Jeffrey Herlings' spell on the class that now stands at eight Grand Prix and just fifteen (!) of sixteen races. The Dutchman has a threat in the Frenchman and the duel could intensify

Photo by Ray Archer


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MX
GRAND PRIX OF TRENTINO
PIETRAMURATA · MAY 15th · Rnd 8 of 18
MXGP winner: Tony Cairoli, KTM
MX2 winner: That Dutch guy...

FROM LATVIA TO GERMANY AND NORTHERN ITALY; IT HAS BEEN A TOUGH THREE WEEK SPELL FOR MXGP BUT FORMER MULTI WORLD CHAMPION TONY CAIROLI HAS THRIVED THANKS TO SOME KEY WORK ON HIS FACTORY 450SX-F THAT IS ALLOWING THE SICILIAN TO FURROW A FURIOUS PACE OUT OF THE GATE. IN ARCO DI TRENTO THE RAINS FELL AND MOTO WINS WERE SHARED BUT CAIROLI'S SECOND VICTORY ON THE BOUNCE BRINGS THREE RIDERS TO WITHIN JUST TWENTY-FIVE POINTS AT THE TOP OF THE STANDINGS. MX2 SAW ONE OF THE BEST RACES OF THE YEAR AS ONE OF THE 250 PACK WAS FINALLY ABLE TO DODGE THE HERLINGS BULLET

By Adam Wheeler
Photos by Ray Archer

WELCOME HOME



PLAY

A small part of me wanted to see Herlings do it: go 'perfect' through the entire season. The chances were ridiculously slim and I suspect that Jeffrey himself harboured only slightly more expectations of the fantasy....but then again Leicester City did just win the English Premier League. This year (as with pretty much every term when he has been healthy) Herlings has been peerless. He exists somewhere between MX2 and MXGP; in his own sub division and could probably make a good run for the podium on his Red Bull KTM 250SX-F in the premier class anyway.

The fact that Dylan Ferrandis ended a fourteen run streak of moto victories at Pietramurata and the damp Arco di Trento soil came down to the three limiters of this sport: personal physical handicaps, a restrictive track and the desire of opposition. Herlings came to Italy off the back of a course of antibiotics for the virus that troubled him in Germany and made his seventh consecutive double the hardest fought this year. He was also still limping after his 'case' at Teutschenthal – that led to finger-pointing at rivals like Jeremy Seewer – and admitted that on Thursday he was close to ducking out of the trip to Arco....until being persuaded by the potency of painkillers.

He encountered a track in Italy that was rougher and softer compared to the three previous editions courtesy of some generous thunderstorms on Saturday; there were lines but riders exclaimed that only one was effective. In Dylan Ferrandis he has a rival that is a technical equal, maybe even superior, and one that baffles with brilliance and frustrates in the same measure. The thrilling climax to the first moto was an action highlight of a busy Grand Prix where exceptional talent like Romain Febvre and Tim Gajser hit the soil but still burst through to set the pace and wily hands like Tony Cairoli exercised control and superiority out of the gate – an essential ingredient of success around this narrow and particular hard-pack.

Germany saw a rattled and clearly unhealthy Herlings still rule the roost. His bizarre post-race TV interview attack on former team manager Stefan Everts, press conference accusations










91
84
4
Kawasaki
KTM



Romain Febvre won't be happy with the amount of time he is tasting dirt - both in crashes and needing to cut through the MXGP pack - but the Frenchman is keeping everyone on their toes. His second race win took him to six for the season and the sixteen so far. Jorge Prado meanwhile (right) sets another milestone with a first EMX250 podium for a career that is certainly in a hurry

of foul riding against Ferrandis and Seewer would indicate a man who is feeling the pressure. The truth is that Herlings does not need to worry about the opposition. He is however veering somewhere near that insecure void of having a lead in the standings so vast that title confirmation will not be long coming into view. The gap is already at 100 (two rounds) and approaching the same margin where he spectacularly lost championships in 2014 and 2015 to injury. In Italy he was apparently more gracious in defeat. When asked what was said between Ferrandis and Herlings after the pair crossed the finish line a second apart the Frenchman merely said: “we hugged”. Herlings gave a more emotionally concrete repost in the second moto by reverting back to his standard thirty second winning advantage (he was 35.1 seconds ahead of teammate Pauls Jonass).

Jeffrey now needs to come through hard-pack tests in Spain and France. In Talavera last year he was very lucky to escape a front endo and St Jean D’Angely will find Ferrandis at his most resistant on home terrain. Matterly Basin has been a source of frustration against Tommy Searle, thrown ham sandwiches and Valentin Guillod in recent times but the Grand Prix of Lombardia at Mantova is the first of three sandy races to come and where Herlings will soon start to place some sort of wrap on 2016.



In MXGP Febvre and Gajser continue to wade through a mix of unrivalled speed and careless mistakes that are painting irregular pictures of their capabilities. Cairoli has been able to profit thanks to his fiery power away from the line and which he credits to some prototype parts on the 450SX-F. Max Nagl will leave Arco disappointed. Second position represented a good outing in the first race but he messed up the second start and complicated first corners at Pietramurata.



EMX250 is in the grips of Thomas Kjer Olsen – the fastest Dane in motocross since Brian Jorgensen - but with Hunter Lawrence and Darian Sanayei also making their presence felt then 2017 could see a superb new influx into MX2. In a way it is a shame that first round conqueror Conrad Mewse has been shuffled into MX2 to sub the injured Thomas Covington. The British teenager could learn plenty from Grand Prix runners but his confidence and race craft would also prosper by winning motos and leading others; it seems that teams still are not really using EMX250 to its full potential. It was encouraging to also see Spain’s Jorge Prado up to speed after his pre-season collarbone break and there are battles aplenty to develop in the remaining six outings of this series.



Tim Gajser has started to describe the Trentino fixture as a 'home' race and the Slovenian contingent of the crowd is growing with each passing edition. The Gajser 'segment' was noisy and appreciative; how long before a whole circuit of them somewhere in Slovenia beckons?


RENTHAL
RENTHAL

CIRCUIT
EQUIPMENT
POLISTIL
PIRELLI

Samuele Bernardini is making waves in MX2 with a lively TM and improved strength and fitness to indicate that Italy could well have someone post-Cairoli to look up to. Fourth place in Trentino was the 21 year old's personal best. Jeremy Seewer (right) missed out on a seventh straight podium finish at the track where he made one of his very first GP appearances four years ago











Good to see Gautier Paulin attempting just his third Grand Prix of 2016. The Leatt-shod Frenchman retired from the first moto after a broken throttle due to a crash but took a top ten finish in the second. The 2015 MXGP runner-up has to be in podium contention soon


MOTUL
HONDA

A day of two halves for Max Nagl while Jordi Tixier (right) made his MXGP debut on the Monster Energy Kawasaki with a steady eleventh position. Kevin Strijbos (top right) leads Gajser on what was the Belgian's best outing of the year so far. Shaun Simpson (top) still has to find the set-up and feeling on the 450SX-F to get close to podium contention. MXGP has yet to see anywhere near the best of the Scot


Tim Gajser 243


MOTOREX
DUNLOP
PROGRIP SUIT



Petar Petrov was all action on the Monster Energy Kawasaki but a left thumb problem for the Bulgarian and a desperate need of good starts are holding him away from the trophies


Red Bull
KTM
MOTOREX
AENA


NAVIJAČI
FOX



No controversy for Van Horebeek in Italy but the Belgian fell short of a rostrum appearance once more. 'JVH' is in need of a gear-flick to get his season heading on an upward trajectory





CLASSIFICATION & WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

MXGP OVERALL RESULT

	Riders	
1	Tony Cairoli, ITA	KTM
2	Romain Febvre, FRA	Yamaha
3	Tim Gajser, SLO	Honda
4	Kevin Strijbos, BEL	Suzuki
5	Max Nagl, GER	Husqvarna

MX2 OVERALL RESULT

	Riders	
1	Jeffrey Herlings, NED	KTM
2	Dylan Ferrandis, FRA	Kawasaki
3	Pauls Jonass, LAT	KTM
4	Samuele Bernardini, ITA	TM
5	Jeremy Seewer, SUI	Suzuki

MXGP STANDINGS AFTER 8 OF 18 ROUNDS

	Riders	Points
1	Tim Gajser	335
2	Romain Febvre	331
3	Tony Cairoli	310
4	Max Nagl	273
5	Evgeny Bobryshev	264

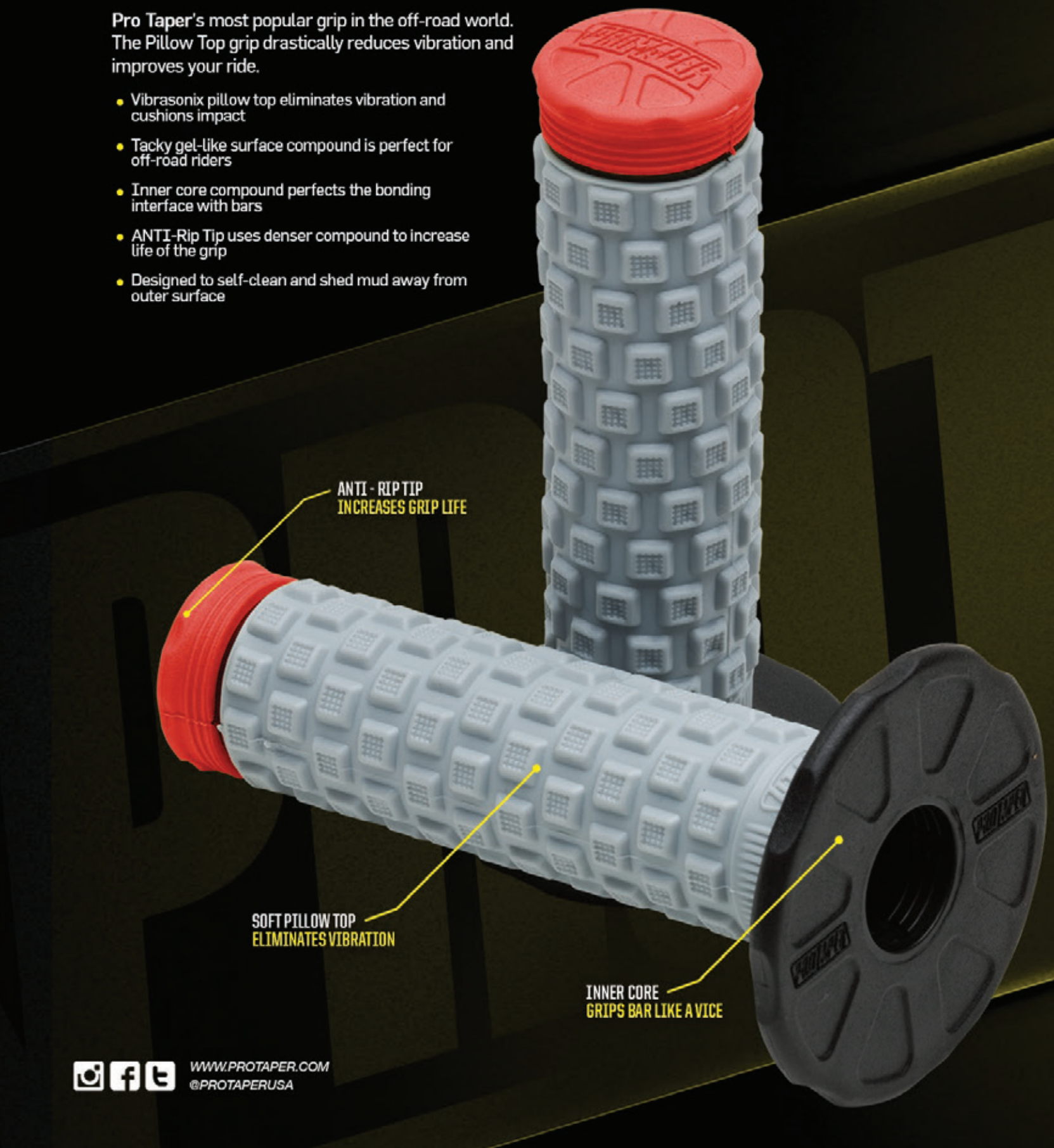
MX2 STANDINGS AFTER 8 OF 18 ROUNDS

	Riders	Points
1	Jeffrey Herlings	397
2	Jeremy Seewer	297
3	Pauls Jonass	260
4	Benoit Paturel	211
5	Aleksandr Tonkov	210

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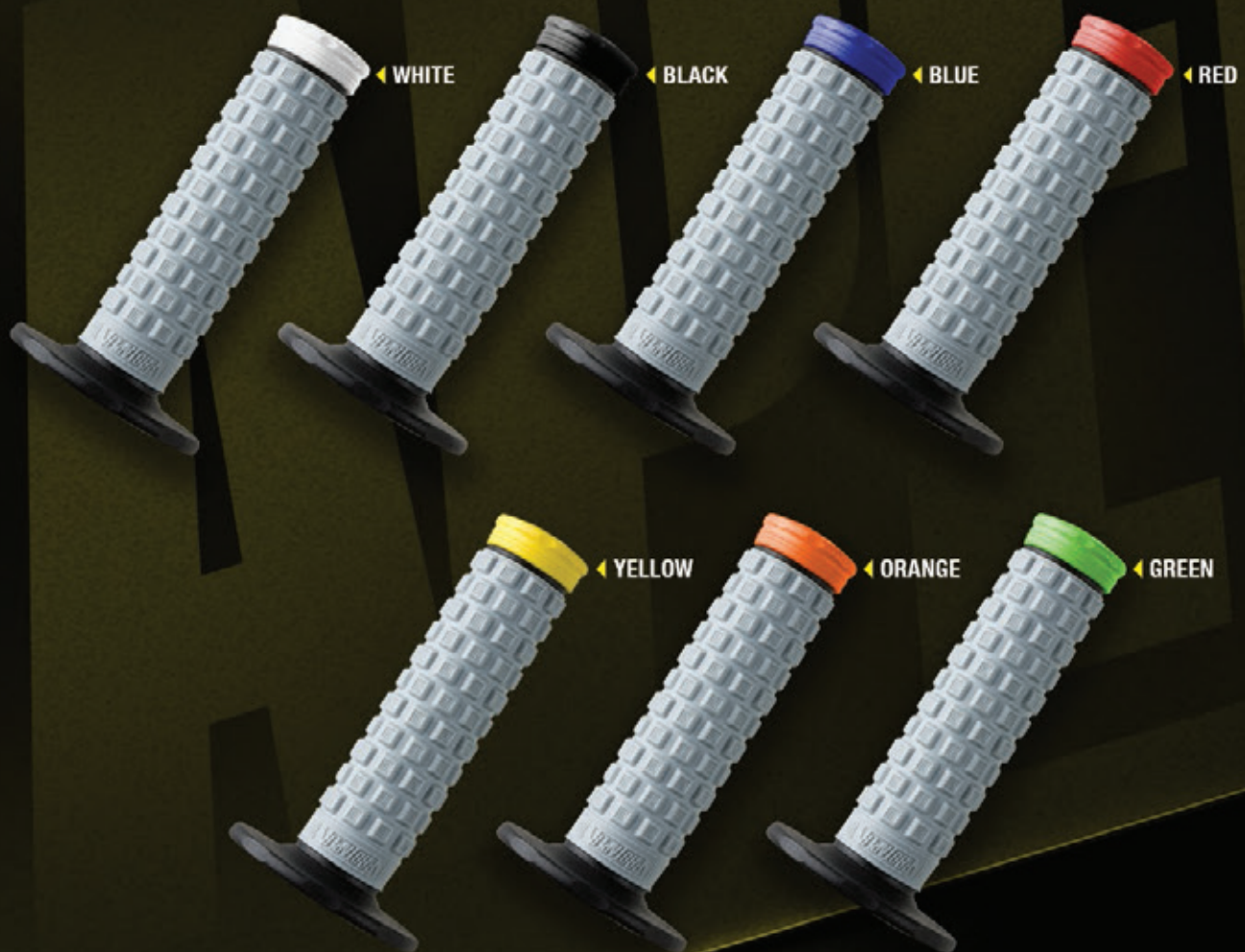
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HEARING THE WORDS...

By Adam Wheeler

I have listened to hundreds and hundreds of Tony Cairoli's comments over the years and there was always the feeling that the Sicilian was ready to play-up or play-down any injury problems. It was not a big deal, but was just a small part of his makeup of superiority over MXGP for so long. In the early days – the mid '00s – we used to smile in the press room when a journalist would come back from talking with the then-Yamaha athlete whose level of English took a little while to reach the high proficiency it boasts today. "Tony is dealing with an injured finger," one would say. "Really? He told me it was his wrist," replied another. "I heard it was his hand," added a third voice. Apart from broken knee ligaments that disrupted a thrilling 2008 MX2 title spat with Tyla Rattray and Tommy Searle, Cairoli has been able to keep people guessing on his fitness front for very long spells of his Grand Prix career. Some were even under the illusion that he didn't really train at all and his social media activity of fishing and beach life cast the champion as a phenomenon (in contrast girlfriend Jill Cox told me once that very few people see or realise the sheer depth of effort and training that Cairoli puts into his racing).

The gruesome arm fracture that he sustained in 2015 seemed the first (clear) major 'spanner' to the KTM rider's works this decade. Cairoli struggled physically and sportingly last summer and images of his forearm and elbow in different hues of green, blue and black were further evidence that the multi champion and Italy's greatest in off-road motorcycling was as hard as they come.

So why the rumination on 222's injury state?

The rider has alluded to the situation himself in recent press conferences by continually claiming that he is not yet punching at optimum fighting weight. The pre-season crash that broke ribs and injured his neck has had complications for nerve and muscle recovery. As Tony himself has said it is an ailment that not many can see...but which he can feel. Cairoli's fans will be hoping that there are no games in play and he is true to his word, and that his inability (so far) to cope with the bustling speed from the likes of Romain Febvre and Tim Gajser (the former six years his junior and the latter some ten years younger) is down to this slow build-up back to full physical potential. Tony has won the last two Grands Prix in Germany and Italy by going 1-1 and 1-2 and those moto victories were built on excellent starts on tracks slightly restricted for passing. It is his most significant spell of success in two years and begins to eradicate the '450 question' over his head and whether leaving the synergy with the 350SX-F that was so potent for five years was actually the best move in the early part of 2015.

Although he might have come into 2016 with new motivation and with the status of 'hunter' rather than 'hunted' for the first time since his MXGP class debut in 2009 (and he would swiftly renew his KTM contract once more to compete until the age of thirty-three) there was always the chance that Tony might not reach the wonderful heights of his title-winning peak: when he'd control races from the first corner or hound rivals until the last lap, surprise on hard-pack and destroy in sand.



Cairoli had the stats, the rewards, the status and the memories to begin an ebb back into the pack and be overtaken by a new generation.

I doubt there is any mystery at all surrounding his present condition and I'm convinced that Tony harbours some inner desire to reach another level of personal performance that would move many to check the calendars that we are not in fact in 2011. In Germany he said: "It was difficult when someone passed you and you could not respond and inside you knew you could do better. From now on I think I can be better every weekend because this shoulder and muscle problem I had was the worse [injury] for me." Cairoli has little to hide because arguably his challenge is greater than in any other season. He has faced threats from Clement Desalle and Gautier Paulin but the speed currently set by Gajser, Febvre and Nagl means that MXGP is straining at the leash. When athletes like Kevin Strijbos, Jeremy Van Horebeek, Shaun Simpson and Evgeny Bobryshev cannot get near then it indicates that 2016 is asking a lot of the racers at this time.

Like most hegemonies people were perhaps tired of seeing that orange 222 continually win and I'll be the first to admit that Romain Febvre's achievement in 2015 was a refresher for MXGP. Despite the rise of Gajser, the development of the 461 and the perseverance of names we know well in MXGP the biggest poser for the championship and the sport at large is how and when Cairoli will respond to '15. We are beginning to see the answer. 2016 could be the greatest of all his titles if he makes it to first place once more. And if there is one rider among a throttling pack of racers behind the gate to keep a clean bill of health then I hope Tony can do so and create some more essential narrative.




41
TREY
CANARD


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AMA BLOG

LOOKING OUTDOORS...

By Steve Matthes

There's no doubt that supercross here in America is where the money, the fame and the prestige is. For no better example of that then see GEICO Honda's Malcolm Stewart bowing out after winning his regional 250SX title and electing not to ride motocross. He's healthy, he's got a contract to ride but the team and the rider have decided his work is done. The glitz and glamour win out yet again over the nitty-gritty.

The 2016 Lucas Oil Pro Motocross Championships comes roaring in this weekend and the 250MX class is full of unknowns while the 450MX class, well, it's shaping up to look at lot like our 450 supercross preview. But let's hope for entertainment sakes, we don't get the supercross results.

Red Bull KTM Ryan Dungey's got the 450SX title in his back pocket and is looking to, like 2015, make it a sweep again. After Eli Tomac's injury in the fifth moto of the year, Dungey started racking up wins and coasted to a yet another championship. Dungey is second in all-time 450MX wins and is looking to creep up on Carmichael's astounding 76 career total.

Let's pause here and look at Dungey's strengths. He seems to have more raw opening lap speed than he's ever had before. His starts have been phenomenal ever since he got on the new bike and the KTM 450SXF looks amazing. He's in incredible shape and actually gets better as the motos go on. He's barely been hurt in his career as well. So, yeah, he doesn't really have a weakness. He's the no-doubt favorite to win again.

Last season Tomac was simply incredible winning four straight motos before that crash in Colorado took him out for the season. Switching to Monster Energy Kawasaki team this year and coming off surgery, things were rocky for Eli and the green team until a "come to Jesus" moment happened where they broke the bike down to begin the process of testing again. The results were a much better machine and Tomac's podium rides at the end of supercross showed that he was much improved. We've seen what he can do on 'red' when the sun shines but for now, there are some questions about the #3.

The former World Champion and 450MX champion, Ken Roczen, also got much better on his Jimmy John's RCH Suzuki around halfway in 450SX and he's professing that he's never been happier with his bike and team than he is now. He need to be if he wants to beat Dungey.

Dungey's teammate Marvin Musquin will be tougher than you think and Rockstar Husky's Jason Anderson will be a star here-and-there and can JGR Yamaha's Justin Barcia rebound from a horrible 450SX season (albeit some races missed with injury) to show his moto winning form from last year?

Honda's Trey Canard and Cole Seely will be factors and Canard's an intriguing rider if you're picking dark horse win threats. He's a past 450MX race winner and he's coming off a supercross season that was, for him, a let down. Special nod to BTO KTM's Andrew Short who will be riding his farewell series before heading off to retirement. At one time, Shorty was a top three man almost every week in this class.

Seriously though, it's hard to see anyone but Dungey, Tomac or Roczen winning this 450MX title. Here's the thing: we've seen Tomac and Roczen beat Dungey quite a bit but the KTM rider is just a machine out on the track. You can't fall in the first turn and get a sixth in a moto, you can't have a mechanical DNF.



The champ gets the starts and he'll take a top three if that's all it comes to. Look at his record 31 straight podium streak in supercross. You can't make mistakes because he doesn't.

In the 250MX class it's expected to be a Jeremy Martin show yet again. The two-time champion is looking to make it three in a row on his Yamalube Star Yamaha and in this media guy's opinion, should be heavily favored to do so. His teammate Cooper Webb would definitely be a challenger to Martin but he's coming in with a wrist injury and isn't expected to be able to race in all of the nationals, maybe not any.

So Martin's got the speed, the skill, the fitness and the bike to make his farewell from the 250's a successful one but who should be the ones to make his life a little difficult? Well for one his teammate Aaron Plessinger got his first national win last year and should be better this year after a supercross season that saw him get his first win there also. Plessinger's a taller rider able to put the bike where he needs it to be and when he's on, he's Kevin Windham-like where you're not sure he's even trying.

It's been a long time since the Monster Energy Pro Circuit Kawasaki team had a week in and week out race winning threat but this year should be the end of that dry spell. Joey Savatgy won his first national last year at Unadilla and is one of those emerging riders that is figuring it out. He's also in great shape. Injuries have robbed can't-miss-kid Adam Cianciarulo of that status a long time ago but AC's on the mend again and should start the series pretty well seeing as how's been riding nothing but outdoors for a while now. He'll be consistently top five, maybe even better, but he's got to prove that he can stay healthy.

Rookie Austin Forkner has some serious hype around him and I think he'll be a title contender in 2017 250SX but for now, he'll be fast now and then. Arnuad Tonus has barely been on the track enough for us to consider him capable of being there every week but there's potential there for sure.

Jessy Nelson of the TLD KTM team will be a factor most weeks especially to start the year in the California tracks. His teammate Justin Hill has been off since a serious crash in supercross and we're not quite sure how he'll be.

The best GEICO Honda rider in the points at the end of the year will probably be Christian Craig but Jordan Smith is more than capable of showing blazing speed now and then along with blazing crashes.

It says here that Martin's biggest problem will come from the veteran Rockstar Husqvarna rider Zach Osborne who underwent arm pump surgery on his first break in SX and at the final round in Vegas said it worked wonders after his second place. Osborne's never won an AMA national so it's hard to see him winning his first race and then a title but his bike is great, he's in shape and he's smart on the track. All things that you need to be when it comes to twenty four 30 minute plus two motos.

But at end of the year look for Martin to join Broc Glover, Mark Barnett, Ricky Carmichael and Ryan Villopoto as the only riders to capture three 250MX (125) titles in a row with Osborne, Plessinger, Savatgy and Cianciarulo providing some challenge now and then.

Let's go racing!


FOX
FLEXAIR









FOX

Something different from Fox. It is commonly assumed that a great many motocrossers get out on their mountain bikes and hit the trails when they fancy an activity a little quieter compared to their day jobs. It's the closest relation to circulating on track and is also a handy form of training to-boot.

Fox's catalogue of products and clothing is vast and it's no surprise that all their investment in motocross gear also filters into other segments. Take the FLEXAIR Libra DH jersey. It retains Fox TruDri moisture management fabric with a double layer knit construction that transports moisture from the inside out. The 4% lycra blend means that the shirt stretches with body movement and Fox have used their stable of downhill athletes to complete tests. They say it is their lightest ever jersey, coming in 25% less than a standard garment and boasts premium comfort. To compliment the look then there's the FLEXAIR race shorts. Again Fox like their lightness claim and state a 34" waist weighs just 13.12 ounces. TruMotion four way stretch 'chassis' means it comes from the same basis at the motocross pant. They have laser perforations for ventilation and the TruMotion fabric has apparently the highest tested abrasion rating of any stretch short in mountain bike; 40% more than the next best on the market. For slightly chillier conditions or runs with heavier vegetation then Demo DH Pant is the optimum choice and also comes in a 'WR' waterproof incarnation.

Based on UK prices the shirt is available for 60 pounds with the shorts at 100 and the pants at 120.


REV'RAY
Husqvarna



RUI GONÇALVES

RUI GONÇALVES ALMOST LOST THE MIDDLE FINGER ON HIS LEFT HAND AFTER A PRE-SEASON RACE ACCIDENT THAT WAS NOT FOR SQUEAMISH. PORTUGAL'S BEST EVER GRAND PRIX MOTOCROSSER HAD TO EFFECTIVELY LEARN TO RIDE AGAIN AND HAS ONLY JUST JUMPED BACK INTO MXGP. AS WELL AS RECOVERING AND TRYING TO COMPETE IN THE PREMIER CLASS THE THIRTY-ONE YEAR OLD IS ALSO FILLING A CRUCIAL ROLE IN LIAISON BETWEEN THE RIDERS AND GP ORGANISERS. IT IS A NEW INITIATIVE AND JOB FOR BOTH MXGP AND THE ATHLETE SO WE SPOKE TO HIM ON HIS COMEBACK AND HIS ALTERED POSITION IN THE SERIES

By Adam Wheeler
Photos by Ray Archer

THE MIDDLE MAN

Portugal love their motorcycle racers. Miguel Oliveira holds special interest in MotoGP and they are flattered with talent in Rally and Dakar (Paolo Gonçalves, Helder Rodrigues). In motocross there is only one reference and recently-turned thirty one year old Rui Gonçalves is a former world championship runner-up and Grand Prix winner that has set the benchmark for achievement, impact and influence for his country.

Rui has been part of the establishment since 2001 and is currently the most experienced Grand Prix runner of them all in the gate. A sixteen year career at the top means he has seen euphoric highs such as wins for Red Bull KTM, podiums for factory HRC and ever-present Motocross of Nations representation. Gonçalves – intelligent, good-looking, multilingual and a pretty decent football player – has also been through the mill. Asking a rider to list his injuries is a little unfair in an interview and one suspects that Rui could make his answer last quite a while. Instead we want to know how he is faring from the dangerous and risky finger mangling accident in pre-season that saw him only return to the track in the last two weeks. Rui also has gathered attention since it emerged last year that he'd be the new link between series promoters and organisers Youthstream and the riding fraternity; a measure implemented after a turbulent 2015 where track preparation attracted criticism and controversy.

Only a few months into his dual existence as Pro racer (on a Husky for the NewHolland 8biano Massignani Husqvarna team) and mediator, Gonçalves is still trying to balance priorities. I've seen him hosting rider meetings on Saturday afternoons and the simple fact that these gatherings are taking place – and the athlete himself can be seen wandering around a track overseeing modifications and changes – means that he is having an effect; that the role is not some form of political appeasement.

"Rui's personality was good for this job," Youthstream President Giuseppe Luongo said to us. "He speaks many languages and communicates well. Also the experience he has is valuable. The first thing for a track is to be safe, the second thing is that a rider will enjoy it and develop. I am completely against a very flat and easy track; if you want the riders to progress then it needs to be technical…but in everything you need a balance."

"We also had to look at maintenance and unfortunately we depend so much on the local organiser," the Italian goes on. "For every event we specify each machine that is needed and when the track should be ripped, watered and everything else but the reality is that sometimes you are a prisoner to what you find. It can be very difficult. Many times it is not because the people don't want [to improve the track] it is the mentality; they see it like their 'house' and they know their track and motocross better than everyone else. They don't understand that our people are at circuits every weekend and have experience."

"Slowly we are improving and this is thanks to people like Rui, and people know we are working together," he concludes. "We want to have the riders happy and enjoying tracks so they make the show."

No stranger to adversity and the traumatic parts of the show (his season-ending crash in 2015 at Matterley Basin that led to ten broken ribs the last-but-one case) Rui is now learning a fresh set of responsibilities and admits his eyes have been opened. Possibly to the extent of his wounded middle finger…


RUI GONÇALVES
933
DUNLOP
NEW HOLLAND
OSMO



"I was really happy to be back racing in Latvia because it was very hard to go through this process of reconstruction of my finger that involved two operations and I still have use of it," he says. "It was a 50-50 situation at one point that I'd be able to use it and I needed to adjust to having that 'new' finger and learn to hold on [to the bike] again."

"I need to use my hand in a different way when I'm riding," he adds. "I'm missing some race rhythm at the moment and noticed that in Kegums when I was in the pack and with the guys; it will take a couple of races for me to get into it straight in the beginning. It is way-different to practice where you put in your laps and motos by yourself. There are a lot of guys out there riding really good and something like fifteen riders who know what it takes to win Grands Prix. The level is high...but that's good."

Romain Febvre said around the time of the injury that it was really gruesome...finally getting it fixed meant having a different riding style? A re-education?

In a way it is because I cannot rely on the tip of my finger like before and have no movement from my last knuckle. It was difficult to hold on when I restarted riding and noticed I was getting blisters in places that I never had before. So I knew I was doing things differently. When you are on the braking bumps and so on that's fine because you are pushing forward but otherwise you have your hands in another position. I've adapted now and didn't really have a choice! I don't think the style has changed that much but it's more about gripping the bike and being safe and not losing the bars. I need some more starts and need to feel out where I can be. I need to find a reference because GP tracks are always more demanding physically. It is like a new beginning for me and jumping in at the sixth round was definitely not easy. I have to be patient and the races are coming thick and fast which helps.



Was it tiring to have to cope with another injury setback, especially one right at the start of the year?
I've had many injuries but luckily I've recovered well from them; the next one is always one too many though! When I looked at my hand right after the crash I realised it was something that was not good at all, something that would take a long time because it was an open wound and a complete mess. The first time they closed it in Italy then also said I needed micro-surgery so I went to Belgium and my doctor made the operation the same day that I arrived. Luckily we did it because the arteries that bring blood to the tip of the finger were off. So the tip of my finger did not have any blood for twenty-four hours. It was good we had the surgery as fast as we did because if we'd waited another day then it would have been dead. They fixed the two bits of bone together and I knew it would be a bit of handicap but I've adapted to it now. Everything went OK but there was a point where it was not improving so we needed another operation to remove the material that had been put inside because my body was rejecting it! In motocross I never had problems with the fingers but it is something that really plays on your mind; you only realise later how much you need that touch and to be able to hold on. But I'm happy I still have the finger and my doctors did the best they could to get me back riding.

Do you think that was the goriest injury? In your career I can think of shoulder, knee, wrist, arm, rib problems and concussions! But this must have been one of the most shocking...
It was shocking and more so when you realise the scope of what is happening. It was a situation where you think 'isn't this from a movie or something?' It doesn't seem real but then you quickly wake up to the fact that, yes, this is your finger and your hand and it's not looking good. Injuries are always the low point of this sport and last year I didn't race much because of the crash in England when I also had concussion.



"WHEN IT COMES TO TRACKS IT WILL NEVER BE POSSIBLE TO PLEASE EVERYONE. ONE RIDER LIKES MORE JUMPS, THE OTHER LIKES THE TRACK FLAT, ANOTHER WANTS IT AS ROUGH AS POSSIBLE, ANOTHER WANTS IT HARD-PACK; IT'S DIFFICULT!"

That was probably more dangerous I had ten broken ribs and remember waking up on painkillers. Even one injury is too much in this sport.

A consequence of the injury was that you had five Grands Prix to get used to this new role. Was it actually useful to have that period?
The idea was to be racing from round one but I couldn't so we made the decision together with Youthstream that I would attend the overseas races to see and understand the behind-the-scenes of the preparation and the whole week-end programme of track prep, watering and whatever. When you riding there are things that you don't really see; you are just looking at your start, the lines and when you actually get on the track maybe it doesn't suit you and you get frustrated. So I wanted to understand more and when I communicated with the riders and then Youthstream and the guys on the track it was for things that it was possible to do but sometimes is difficult to get things done.

An example?
Well, if you come to a place and the terrain is like concrete - really, really hard – and there isn't the machinery to do anything about it or they had broken down. Is not like the guys are not trying and this year they are trying to get it better for everyone, especially for the riders. Youthstream has track designers and track builders and they do a good job so when the sessions start we identify some things and talk with the riders, get advice and try to be better; that's the goal.

It is encouraging to see a current, active Pro filling that role – that gap – between the riders and organisation. What kind of feedback have you had?
I think the riders are happy that they can talk to someone who is racing with them. It is easy to talk about what we see and feel, we know if a jump needs more care or is a corner could be ripped a bit more on the inside or outside. Everybody can start to understand better what is going on. With all respect some people on the outside see things that we cannot pick up on while we're racing. I think it is a win-win because we have that outside perspective while I am also racing the track and then every Saturday evening I'm holding a little meeting to see what can be better for the weekend. Sometimes it is not about transforming the whole track; it is about leaving places that should be left and working on others to make it better.... and if it can be better I'm 100% sure that the track crew will try as much as possible to get it done.

I saw you do the meeting in Valkenswaard, there didn't seem to be many riders there – maybe six or seven – I thought there'd be more...
As soon as I have a group of riders that want to be there and have their say – even when everything is fine and they feel they don't need to come – then it is still good to have that gathering and any feedback. I can say that I have a good relationship with everyone and don't have a problem if people come or not, but it's always nice to share some ideas between riders to try to improve some points for a better racing on Sunday. I don't have the whole package in my hands so this is a part-time 'solution' while I'm still racing so I try to do my best. I think some people before were missing that 'point of contact' and that's why it would be good to collect and give some advice. It will never be possible to please everyone. One rider likes more jumps, the other likes the track flat, another wants it as rough as possible, another wants it hard-pack, it's difficult! But the goal is to try and have an overall positive feeling.

It's like being a football manager: some might think you are doing a good job, others no...
For sure it's not easy but I want the riders to feel like they can say something and from my side I will give the message straight to the track crew so they can try to make it happen. I've had bad races in the past and when I haven't got-on with the track or I was having a bad day, I'd be in the camper afterwards saying: "I don't like it, I don't feel comfortable with it, the ruts are too deep, it's not ripped enough and so on". Now we can do something about it and try to improve it, get better and safer to ride - definitely safer, that's the main goal – but it is a difficult situation because pleasing the whole paddock will be so hard!

Last year there seemed to be a lot of criticism so are you aware that there is a spotlight on you and the role you are filling...
My name came forward...and before there was no name. So I know there is some attention. They knew before that I was a guy they could talk to and it is not like I just have my own ideas. The goal is to have the riders happy and that they enjoy the track and feel safe. All I can do is my job as a rider first and then be that link between the riders and the track...





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BRACING UP

EVGENY BOBRYSHEV CAN HARDLY SUPRESS A SHEEPISH GRIN WHEN TALKING ABOUT HIS PAST (AND SOMETIMES CURRENT) PROPENSITY TO EJECT FROM HIS RACEBIKE BUT WE'RE CURIOUS TO ASK THE TOUGH RUSSIAN WHY HE DECIDED TO CLICK AN ATLAS NECK BRACE INTO PLACE MIDWAY THROUGH THE MXGP SEASON...

By Adam Wheeler
Photos by Ray Archer



Evgeny Bobryshev is late. Erstwhile Honda Press and PR rep Tom Tremayne is hovering a little nervous as the large Fox promo stand in the Teutschenthal paddock opposite the HRC hospitality is prepping for an autograph session for which the Russian is the star attraction. Finally the winner of this German Grand Prix in 2011 somewhat hesitantly comes in through the door. A mild slap on the shoulder wasn't the best idea as the father of one winces and then reveals a batter upper arm joint; a result of his heavy qualification tumble in Latvia the previous weekend.

Bobby has bounced so far in 2016. He is still looking for the consistency that drew the twenty eight year old to third place in the world in 2015 and the GP winning potential of Qatar has been seen sparingly. Evgeny has been the sole rep of the official Honda crew in MXGP but has been in the weird position of watching HRC's attention veer heavily to brandmate Tim Gajser as the Slovenian embarks on a wonder season. Gautier Paulin would be back in action the following week in Italy but since round three Bobryshev has had the might of the multi national crew all to himself.

The Russian is always fun company and has a gentle and self-deprecating sense of humour even when he is on the clock. We're here to chat neck protection. It was strange – but heartening - to see Bobryshev adopting an Atlas neck brace from round four in Argentina [teammate Paulin is now also using a Leatt] so it is a pocket-weighing endorsement deal or something far less cynical? Here's a catch-up with 777...

In Qatar you were so strong but what has happened since?
It is a good question. Each weekend after Qatar has had 'something' and usually a crash or a problem on Saturday that has set us back. I had a big one in Mexico. A kicker sent me off and I damaged my elbow and right side so I was recovering for a couple of weeks. By Latvia I'd done good training and I was fastest in Timed Practice by half a second but then another crash in the qualification race and a damaged shoulder...

Too many crashes...
I would not say too many; I have been crashing way-more in the past! But just too much bad luck on Saturday. At Valkenswaard, which is one of my favourite tracks, we had a little set-up problem. I don't know why it happens on Saturday. Maybe we are rushing too much and we end up with a bad gate position. Overall it is not too bad and I'm close to third in the championship. I was really happy with sixth place in Latvia with that injury because there was one point where I thought I wasn't going to make it but the team and the medical centre did a great job. The two guys at the front are quite far it seems but as soon as I am 100% I want to push. Tim and Romain seem they have another step...

But it will be difficult for them to keep that up all year...
That's true. When you look at them it's like they are on the limit sometimes and it seems crazy. It's like they've never had a big crash! We'll see what the races will bring but I have to concentrate and push and try to catch up. People are already saying 'they're gone' but how can they say that after five or six races? I know if they continue like that then they will escape but I won't give up and I always try to be optimistic. I know I can make it happen.

How has it been with Paulin being absent? It means HRC are hedging their bets with you...
For me it is the same...maybe a different pressure. When there are two riders then that pressure gets separated! 50 for me 50 for him! The team don't make too many demands and I really respect them for this. They know I do as much as I can and I also have my goal and my mission. It is a shame that Gautier got injured but HRC are looking a lot at Tim now.


EVGENY BOBRYSHEV
HONDA
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You've started using an Atlas neck brace. You wore neck protection before didn't you?
Yes, it was back in 2008-2009, two years with Leatt and I think from that time the neck braces have really developed a lot. Also the Leatt brace. I had a problem with a chest injury in 2009 so I stopped [using the brace] and lost a bit of faith. Recently I had some contact from Atlas just asking me if I'd like to try and test the brace and they shipped it through. I was a bit unsure. I knew it would have to be comfortable and it would have to suit me ideally for me to wear it. I rode with the Atlas for quite a long time before I used it in a race; almost one month I was testing it. I even crashed a few times pretty hard with it! Actually the first time I wore it I had a massive one and buried my head right in the ground! In the beginning it was rising up so I tried a different chest protector.

So in the end you didn't have any issues?
No...the brace was so light and I needed some tweaks to make it a bit higher. When I crashed I could feel that it was pushing the muscles rather than resting on the bone. That was important for me. The fact that it weighed nothing meant that it was easy to pack and take overseas...in the end it was easy to make a deal and I was happy to be part of Atlas and join quite a few riders in the U.S.

I remember Herlings saying that he quickly got to a point with the Leatt that he simply didn't notice he was wearing it...
I don't feel it. When I'm riding and training I tend to notice it more but in the race not at all. It becomes part of your equipment.

So you had to modify it?
Yeah, just lift it up. Maybe my neck is a bit longer; like a giraffe! It was important to have the brace closer to the helmet so when you crash you are quickly halting some momentum and limiting movement of the neck. Atlas have a lot of product support and spare parts to get – and keep – the brace exactly as you need it. It's also really easy to clean.


EVGENY BOBRYSHEV

Were you keen to use neck protection again?
I was worried about positioning of other braces and they way they rested near the collarbone and other areas of the body. That's why I took my time to choose and then rode with the Atlas for a quite a while to make sure and understand it. I needed to get on the bike with it. I think some riders in this paddock don't believe in neck protection or have not tried a good one.

It is unusual to see a factory rider take neck protection once the season has started...
Many guys have asked or said to me "why you start with a neck brace now?" and the only reason is that I feel good and comfortable with this one. I also believe in the protection and I think the limited movement has an effect. I've had a lot of people asking me from Russia and I just tell them to try it and they'll get it.

Can Atlas customise it for you?
Well, at the moment I have three different ones. Fox always have different coloured gear and I have red, yellow and blue and for Atlas it isn't a problem for them to do any colour. It is just the beginning of the relationship but I already feel that anything is easy for the guys. I imagine if I need something special for the Motocross of Nations then it should be doable.



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Race one winner: Tom Sykes, Kawasaki
Race two winner: Nicky Hayden, Honda





WORLDSBK'S NEW STRUCTURE THREW ITS FIRST SIGNIFICANT JOKER ON THE TABLE LAST WEEKEND IN MALAYSIA WITH TWO DIFFERENT DAYS OF WEATHER AND THUS TWO DIFFERENT WINNERS. WORLD CHAMPION JONATHAN REA WAS THE ONLY 'CONSTANT' AS THE KAWASAKI MAN MAINTAINS HIS 100% PODIUM RECORD BUT SEPANG WAS RULED BY TOM SYKES AND NICKY HAYDEN AS THE SERIES CONTINUES TO TURN AND CHURN WITH SIX ROUNDS NOW IN THE BAG

NICKY'S REIGN

Blogs by Graeme Brown & Matthew Roberts
Photos by Kawasaki/GeeBee/Ducati Corse/
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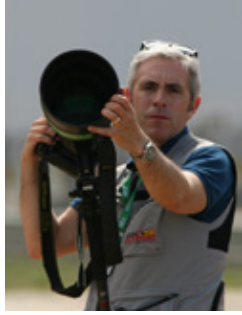
Sykes (below) and Hayden shone with equal measure in the dry-wet haze of Sepang and upon a costly track resurface that was met with positive feedback. Hayden's result was Honda's first podium in Malaysia since 1990. Davide Giugliano grabbed his second podium of the season and his best result with second place


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PUTTING THE PUZZLE TOGETHER...

By Graeme Brown

It was interesting to read the news on Monday as I travelled home from Sepang that Dani Pedrosa had chosen to stay with Honda in MotoGP till 2018. The timing made me chuckle. Had he been waiting to see what Jonathan Rea would do before making a decision?

That was the big news in the WorldSBK paddock this weekend. The current Champion Rea has put his signature on a new two year contract with Kawasaki Racing Team. The only surprise to me was how soon everything had been decided.

With Rossi and Lorenzo kicking off the transfer season early in MotoGP there had been speculation that Rea might be tempted to look at a GP seat as he had at the end of 2014. His stock has surely risen as a WorldSBK Champion so he needn't necessarily have to hawk himself round the paddock.

I managed to catch up with him over a chicken satay in KL airport before flying home and in reality it was pretty simple. A move to MotoGP hadn't really crossed his mind when Kawasaki offered him a new two year deal. There were some minor details to negotiate but these were quickly resolved and the deal was done.

My understanding is that the Catalan Provec Racing squad had only been given the green light (pardon the pun) to continue the Kawasaki Superbike project a few weeks ago. To secure Rea's signature in such a short space of time must mean that both sides are really comfortable with what they have.

Team manager Guim Roda explained to me that the plan was always to continue with Kawasaki and to keep Rea and Sykes on board. So two parts of the plan are now in place. It only needs Sykes to complete the puzzle. As far as I know he has been offered a deal as well and the negotiations are on-going. It could be that the deal has already been done and KRT are managing the publicity but then again Sykes has been on the ZX-10R for seven years and no one would blame him if he felt he would like a new challenge.

Yamaha on the other hand could not buy any luck at the moment. With Sylvain Guintoli sidelined after his crash in Imola, Alex Lowes was the lone flag bearer for the team in Sepang. Having made progress with the machine development in Imola there was fairly buoyant mood in the pit box on Thursday. In the airport on Sunday night, however, they looked like a football team that had just been knocked out of the cup.

Alex Lowes crashed in race 2 on Sunday and has suffered a broken collarbone. With the Crescent team's home race at Donington coming up next it looks like they will have to draft in a couple of stand in riders to make it on to the grid. This, however, could be an ideal opportunity for them, by choosing a replacement rider whose sole task could be to further the development of the machine allowing Guintoli and Lowes to return to action and concentrate on getting results.



It was great to see Nicky Hayden put the Honda on the top step, both for Nicky and the team. I think both needed a good result. Hayden has been knocking on the door in the last few races and whilst the weather played a role in his victory at the weekend it was nonetheless impressive to see him dominate in such fashion.

The Sepang circuit itself held up to the conditions pretty well. There was a lot of consternation at the start of the weekend over how the new surface would play out. Having spent $3.5 million (USD) you would hope they had got it right. By all accounts it was pretty good. There was a little concern about groundwater leaching out of the surface in some turns but by in large the riders gave it a thumbs-up, even in the wet.

That huge investment, however, maybe a little too much to continue hosting a WorldSBK event. I spoke with some local photographers and they had heard that the event hadn't been attracting the level of public interest that was hoped, so the circuit, and local government were not keen to extend the current agreement with Dorna. It would be a shame as it is a great venue for a race and as a Scotsman I am always amazed at the concept of warm rain.



FINDING A PLACE...

By Matthew Roberts

As the 'Star Spangled Banner' rang out over the Sepang International Circuit on Sunday in recognition of Nicky Hayden's first World Superbike win its unfamiliarity was jolting. The dearth of young American talent coming into international road racing is well documented and finally being addressed by the new MotoAmerica series run by Wayne Rainey et al. PJ Jacobsen celebrated two wins in the Supersport class last year but otherwise you have to go back to Ben Spies' dominance of the 2009 season to find evidence of American success in World Superbikes. In MotoGP, of course, only Spies and Hayden have taken the stars and stripes to the top step of the podium in the time since Kenny Roberts Jr's last win in 2000.

It has been a long held opinion of mine that riders cling on for too long in a championship they know they can't win. Self-belief is, obviously, the cornerstone of any rider's psyche but sometimes a dash of realism isn't such a bad thing. The truth is that most people in the MotoGP paddock look down their nose at World Superbikes and it seems that once a rider considers himself a Grand Prix rider it is difficult to revaluate that notion without a sense of having given up in some way.

Maybe this was the case for Nicky, an official MotoGP Legend who you have to credit for his commitment to the series even though, in the end, he did nothing to enhance his legacy by spending two years on an 'Open' spec Honda. Even more disheartening for his fans, and probably his friends and family, was the fact that he didn't look to be enjoying himself for those last few years. That trademark grin and the wisecracking good humour of the Kentucky Kid, such a refreshing addition to the championship when he arrived back in 2003, were fading and Nicky was in danger of falling out of love with the sport he adored.

But then, how could developing an uncompetitive bike with the ultimate goal of an 'Open' category win or a handful of points ever recreate the buzz he'd experienced when winning those epic races at Laguna Seca and Assen, or lifting the title on that unforgettable day at Valencia? Shane Byrne, who has turned down several uncompetitive WSBK rides over the years in favour of dominating British Superbikes, summed it up well alongside me in the Eurosport studio. "There's no feeling in the world like winning, that's for sure. I remember Carl Fogarty in his heyday saying that if he wasn't winning he didn't care. I used to think 'that's so arrogant, you should just want to go and race motorbikes!' But that was the winner in Carl and as your career progresses you find that being the case. Second's alright, but you might as well be last. Once you have experienced winning, nothing comes close."

Some people argue Fogarty was taking the easier option by not facing up to Mick Doohan in 500cc GPs, but that's another story. Personally I take my hat off to the likes of Eugene Laverty and other young riders forsaking the chance to win races in World Superbikes in order to chase their Grand Prix dream. But for those that have already lived it, or have come to realise it is beyond them, it might be time to set new goals. Colin Edwards felt he had no need to go back to WSB, having won it twice in 2000 and 2002, but how much more fun would it have been to see him go back there and fight for a third title rather than flogging around fighting for CRT wins for three years?



Nicky revealed after Sunday's race that not many teams were willing to offer him a chance in WSB, which is amazing when you consider what he has achieved in his career. Maybe they thought he was a 'big shot' but that could not be further from the truth and the Ten Kate Honda team were rewarded immediately during preseason with his dedication to testing, his work ethic and his development knowledge, which along with extra input from HRC has squeezed fresh life out of the ageing Fireblade. It took wet conditions to help Hayden to his first win but he'd have taken it however it came. The look on Nicky's face, the quiver on his chin and the shaking in his voice when he gave his post-race interview show how much winning means to him. And, as fans, haven't we missed it?

At the same time, the disappointment on the face of Jonathan Rea was evident despite the fact that a second and a third at Sepang were enough to extend his overall championship lead. Given his current form it's hard to imagine Jonathan wouldn't have had offers to move to MotoGP himself next season but, having experienced it as a replacement for Casey Stoner a couple of years ago, he has decided he enjoys winning too much. At the age of 29 and with 34 wins already to his name compared to Fogarty's record of 59, a new two-year deal with Kawasaki gives JR the opportunity to become the most successful World Superbike rider of all time. And wouldn't that be something worth smiling about?







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(ITALIAN) SKY IS THE LIMIT

By Adam Wheeler
Photos by CormacGP & Sky Racing Team VR46

FROM THE COLOURS, TO THE YOUTHFUL STAFF AND IMPRESSION OF VIGOUR (MUCH IN THE MOULD OF ONE OF THE KEY CO-OWNERS) TO THE FORMIDABILITY ON THE TRACK, SKY RACING TEAM VR46 HAVE TO BE CONSIDERED ONE OF THE PREMIER SET-UPS IN MOTOGP. THE MOTO3 AND SOON-TO-BE MOTO2 SQUAD HAS SPREAD SOME LONG ROOTS INTO THE SCENE AND REPRESENT THE ULTIMATE ROUTE FOR FAST NATIONAL TALENT TO PROGRESS TO THE PINNACLE OF THE SPORT. ONCE AGAIN THE ITALIANS SEEM TO HAVE SET THE BAR WHEN IT COMES TO GOING RACING. WE SPOKE TO SOME OF THE KEY FIGURES AT THE HEART OF THE CREW TO UNDERSTAND WHAT THE TEAM IS ALL ABOUT...


sky
VR46
OZ RACING
OZ RACING

Entering the Sky Racing Team VR46 hospitality means being confronted by a mammoth TV screen, an overwhelming crowd of people, mechanics, staff and riders (it is lunchtime at Le Mans) and a long table of Italian buffet that looks as immaculate as the surroundings and set-up. We're left in no doubt that the outfit and its expanding roots (see VR46 Riders Academy and the Junior Team VR46 Riders Academy) are a classy prospect and forceful presence in the Moto3 category. The KTMs are instantly recognisable thanks to that distinctive shade of black, blue and flashes of yellow and with Roman Fenati (20 years old), Andrea Migno (also 20) and Nicolo Bulega (just 16) they are cutting an ever-present form at the front of the crazily-competitive 250cc division.

It is easy to dismiss the whole VR46 and Sky link-up as some sort of exclusive Italian 'club'; helmed in name and actually some personal involvement by one of the sport's greatest riders and icons and with the flattery of a major TV channel. The truth – that we discover from a series of Italian-English straining interviews - is that Sky Racing Team VR46 is a bar-setter. It is a reference point for other companies, sponsors, federations and manufacturers for their racing set-ups and potential reach outside of the asphalt. Sky Racing Team VR46 has the good fortune of Rossi's patronage and seemingly never-dimming passion for the sport, Italy's swooning obsession over motorcycle racing and the shortcuts to mass exposure that many other countries cannot match due to Grand Prix's nominal position left of the mainstream. They do it well though. It is more than just a racing crew; it is an injection of new talent into Grand Prix and part of the pyramid that involves the academy and the Spanish championship/junior championship team and will stretch in Moto2 from 2017.

Now three years old and counting on technical staff numbering fourteen (without considering others like specialists in Press – the irrepressible Laura Beretta – catering and logistics) the team was created out of Rossi's dealings with Sky and his urge to mean something more in motorcycle racing than simply a barrage of personality and statistics. Somehow and at sometime both parties found some common ground and plugged elements like the academy, KTM support and former 125cc GP star Pablo Nieto as Team Manager into the overall picture.

"It was not difficult to make the team happen because we found a great partnership together with VR46 [Rossi's business empire]," says Elena Sacchi, Head of Special Projects and Sky Campus at Sky Italia. "It happened quite fast and we made a strong link with a common strategy. It was important to have that collaboration from the beginning. This was the best option we could have and then the relationship with Valentino made it even more special. We both think in the same way and this is very important."

"Motorsport is really important for Sky because it is the second pillar in our sports strategy," she adds. "The first is soccer and second is motorsport. We have two twenty-four hour channels: one for F1 and the second for MotoGP. MotoGP is really important in Italy."

Nieto was drafted in by Rossi and his staff to streamline and manage the operation for 2015; befitting its Grand Prix status. "I was team manager at Laglisse and we won the world championship with Maverick [Viñales] and have always had a good relationship with Vale, Uccio and the guys," the Spaniard recounts. "In 2013 they told me they were going to make a Moto3 team and talked me through all the doubts they had because they'd never built or ran a team. So I helped a lot and in 2014 they made it happen. In 2014 I remember having a dinner with Valentino, Uccio and friends and we were just talking and Vale said: "Pablo, one day you'll be working for me" and I said "where, where and how you want; it'd be incredible to work with you; I won't even have to think about it".













FOCUS: SKY RACING TEAM VR46

Unfortunately for them and fortunately for me they started to have some problems with the team and they asked for help and that's how we started."

How was it for the thirty-five year old to enter a predominantly Italian environment? "Difficult in the way that it is such an Italian project and the guy near the top of it is Spanish!" he smiles. "I think the important part of any project like this is to have good people around you and I think we made a great team where there is a mix of nationalities: a bit of everything. In between races I am more in Spain. In the winter then I'm in Italy quite a lot."



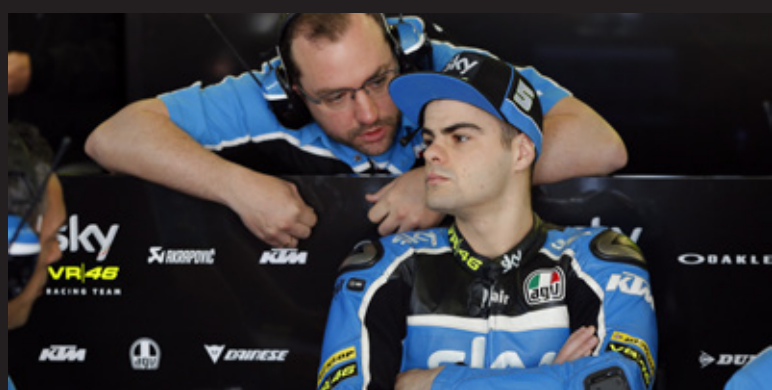
With Sky actively engaged (Nieto: "the relationship with Sky is really good and they are not a sponsor; they are part of the project and this is really important. To have a partner like Sky is really valuable") the other part of the equation comes from VR46 and their base in Tavullia where the Academy, The Ranch and all factions 'Rossi' collide. "VR46 take care of race operations and Sky is more about communications and aligning all the strategy when it comes to the racing team," says Sacchi.

"There is no pressure with Sky….remember we live every day with Vale so he is at the highest level you can be," offers Cami Fratesi, VR46's Social and Web Content Manager. "It is easy to talk and work with Elena or Pablo. The focus around the team is the same and this saves a lot of time."

"The reaction in Italy was very nice and one of curiosity I think," says Sacchi. "In the first year we had some problems but the partnership was strong and we grew for the second year. This is the third and we have Moto2 on the horizon."

Sky Racing Team VR46 came to be and for 2016 entered three riders into the mix. While Fenati, Migno and Bulega almost sing about the opportunity they have been presented with there is no avoiding the fact that the presence of Rossi, Sky and the whole fuss around the team makes for nervy confines.

"I'm fine with it now but in the beginning I was a bit nervous and stressed about it," says Fenati, a racer who has celebrated at least one GP win in each term with SRTVR46. "I feel the pressure but to have too much of that is not the way to make good results. So it motivates me and pushes me. Valentino is my favourite rider and to come to his team and speak with him was a big thing. I always watched the MotoGP on television as a kid and to be with Vale in a team with the quality of a MotoGP set-up was quite something to take onboard. It is amazing how many people are working on this project."





"Yes, I feel there is time to grow here but I also feel that 2016 is important and I need to show some good results," says Migno now with the unit for a second season. "If I can make it then great, everything will stay good. If not then it becomes more difficult. You can always learn and that means each and every session and you have to be intelligent to keep your eyes, ears and mind open. When you get home then people are always pushing and want you to do well...but it is not easy! I'm happy to hear people pushing me on but..."

"Well...with this, fortunately, I'm somewhat accustomed and I think that every rider needs to have a bit of pressure," opines Nieto. "If a rider doesn't have pressure then it means there isn't anyone interested in him. To have Valentino is really good and to have that pressure is also good. When I was racing I was the son of Angel Nieto...so, it's good."

Of course Rossi hangs over the whole set-up like some Greek god. He is continually referenced and revered and it is clear that Sky Racing Team VR46 is not some vanity project.



"From the first minute Valentino knew about everything but at the same time I filled the role as a filter so that he only had to deal with the important things," insights Nieto. "The big decisions we made together and Valentino is the 'chef' of everything. He listens to all that we suggest and advise and we then take the decisions."

"If Valentino thinks I am worthy of a place then it is a real honour," shines Bulega; one of the current riders that Rossi admitted in Jerez was a 'gamble' for 2016 and has already taken a podium result. "I think he is the greatest rider of all time. Yes, he could be my father! But he is like a brother and we train at The Ranch or the gym almost every day. He is like a good friend."

There is the danger that the riders have too many bosses with input coming from VR46, Nieto and then Comms from Sky but Nieto says dealing with this situation is part of the job.

"I think a rider has to be intelligent and know how to take parts from what every person might say and digest what he needs," he claims. I could say five things to a rider but it could be that just two really register or he thinks 'I need to focus on that'. He has to know how to take advice, analyse it and use it. We know that Valentino is one of the greatest riders in the history of the sport but it's also possible that his advice doesn't really apply. Every rider is a different 'story'."



NIETO: "I SAY TO EVERYONE THAT THIS IS A MotoGP TEAM...BUT SMALLER! IT'S REALLY, REALLY SIMILAR..."


sky
agv
KTM
VR46
DUNLOP

Bulega: “I think this team is really important because both Sky and VR46 give a lot of help. I think if it wasn’t for VR46 then I would not be here now.”

The VR46 Riders Academy is the grass roots for Sky Racing Team VR46 and the staging point for which the Moto3 squad crops the cream. It is Rossi’s creation and embryo and his tangible link with his sport - the show of MotoGP - but also his life away from the track in Tavullia.



“I live with my parents and around ten kilometres from Tavullia and we train and ride bicycles together,” reveals Bulega. “The other VR46 riders do motocross and I like it but I think it is too dangerous. We are always together and we go to dinner, sometimes sushi, or maybe to the disco when we are home: sometimes!”

“Tavullia is a small city and it is all about Valentino,” says the impossibly friendly Fratesi. “It is important to him and he wants all the activities like VR46, the Academy, The Ranch, Bar Rossi near his home. It is like a large ball and he comes to The Ranch with his friends… not to make a show. Vale made this decision maybe six or seven years ago and it was important for him to stay near the ‘real’ people or his old friends. It was easy for him to build collaboration with Sky because it was born before the team and now it is a partner for us.”

From the images and tales heard of the VR46 Riders Academy it does sound like Italian youngsters mad on bikes and with a propensity for speed have an authentic dream to shoot for. “It is like being at school but not a real school because they are all day on the bike at The Ranch, mini bikes or ‘Cross,” Fratesi continues. “It is more like a gang or family, with Vale as the big brother and they all look up to him and he coaches them on the track. The school element comes through the academy because there are guys for management, the training, the mental preparation, nutrition. We have a girl in the office called Barbara who pulls everything together…she is almost like a mum! It is hard work and we are always very busy. I spend all day on the office but then afterwards the guys will be sending me messages asking for photos or asking me to come to The Ranch.” She pauses; “I think we are living a small piece of history of the sport. Maybe in twenty years I can say: ‘I remember working with Fenati, Migno or Bulega…’ for example. You follow these guys as they make their own story.”

“We are a little bit famous because it is a small town and we tend to know everybody,” Bulega sheepishly admits.

Unsurprisingly the VR46 Riders Academy is like a nerve centre for the team and the project that is orientated to identify, develop and promote young prospects. “It is a key strategy for Sky that people see the youth element and this comes through in the content; like it is for X Factor for music and Masterchef for the kitchen and for sport this is the same,” says



Sacchi. “Sky Italia believe in Italian talent and we grow together. We invest in this. MotoGP is very different for us because we don’t have a team in soccer or in F1.”

Every team has a character and profile but Sky Racing Team VR46 has that extra sheen and appeal, a sea of potential stemming from the names on the truck. “I say to everyone that this is a MotoGP team…but smaller! It’s really, really similar,” asserts Nieto.

Nieto is one of several people in our talks that use the MotoGP comparison (Fenati: “It is difficult to have all the media looking at us and Sky is one of the most important channels in Italy and we have a lot of activities. It is like being part of a MotoGP team. We always have to make a good job on the track but also all the interviews!”). Despite all the ambition that is housed in the hospitality and squashed pit box with three bikes in place there is no desire to lose sight of the original goal even if they will be spread in two categories from next year. Does MotoGP eventually beckon? Why not go all the way with someone like Fenati for example? “Absolutely not,” Sacchi smiles. “I think the riders themselves have to go. We want to work with them to prepare them for that challenge. We don’t want to be there as a team. Our message is talent and youth and we manage that with VR46 in this magical situation in Moto3, which has been so satisfying that we decided to enlarge and go for Moto2. MotoGP is something different; we just want to support the talent on the scale from Moto3 to Moto2. We believe that our riders will be able to go to MotoGP after the experience with us.”

“This year we have three bikes and next season we will also have three but with just two in Moto3,” ponders Nieto. “In the end the project is to elevate young talent and point them towards MotoGP, so for this we really need a Moto2 step. We have the Junior team in the Spanish Championship and Junior World Championship, Moto3 and now Moto2.”

The impact of Sky Racing Team VR46 has been carefully noted. There is a rumour that BT Sports in the UK were paying close attention and could follow with a similar model for aspiring Brits. The team have rich tentacles. Fratesi: “It is like a family with Sky at the top for communication, the riders, Pablo, Uccio and Valentino Rossi; it is a bit like the best set-up you can have.”

Migno, one of three at the centre of an exciting whirlwind, concurs and neatly sums up the scenario for all involved. “This team is very important in this category; up there with Estrella Galicia and Ajo. We are one of the best and can fight for the win every race. We have pressure but it normal; best bike, organisation, crew and set-up so you don’t have any excuses.”



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6D have already won awards for their forward-thinking ODS technology and application for off-road motorcycle helmets and their recent launch of the **ATS-1 Street** carbon helmet was no great surprise. In the first years and versions of the motocross lid the helmets were slighted for their dimensions and design; something that 6D have worked hard to progress and leading up to the impressive 2016 line. For the launch of the ATS-1 Street the first thing that catches is the eye is a sleek and aesthetically pleasing form and build; the helmet looks the part from the get-go. With three principal choices – Gloss Black, Gloss White (our pick) and Matte Black – 6D have made a quiet statement of intent by not wishing to divide clientele through loud graphics or trendy colours.

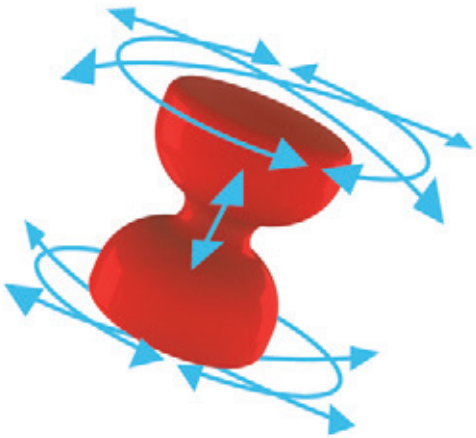
6D boldly use the slogan 'like nothing else' for the ATS-1 Street and the list of specs and features of the helmet made for hefty – and impressive – reading. The California-based company claim it was three years in the making and is the first road helmet to embrace ODS (Omni Directional Suspension). "Exceptional energy management capability was known and guaranteed, but engineering the shield, shell design, interior liner amenities, and air-flow management system, was a challenge that had to be completed without compromise," they state.

ATS-1 Street has an advance cooling system (4 intake ports, 15 transfer ports and 4 'exhausts'), anti-scratch Pinlock visor (shield) and a carbon fibre shell in three sizes. The rundown includes: Patented Omni-Directional Suspension technology, 3K Carbon Fibre Shell Lay-up, aerodynamic CFD (Computational Fluid Dynamic) Aided Shell Design, 3 Shell Sizes, aggressive Air Management System, exclusive Articulating Shield Pivot, micro (10 Position) Shield Adjustment, locking Shield Lever, EPS Lined Chin Bar, Rear Delta Vent, aerodynamic Wing, removable / Washable Comfort Liner, internal Breath Guard, removable All-Weather Chin Cover, integrated Speaker Pockets, emergency Release Cheek Pads, exceeds ECE and DOT standards and carries a 3-Year Limited Warranty.

www.6dhelmets.com has a wealth of information about the products, the research and the philosophy of the company. It is impossible to leave the pages unsure of what the product does and how what it could mean for your life on a motorcycle. Expect the ATS-1 Street to be available for around 900 dollars.







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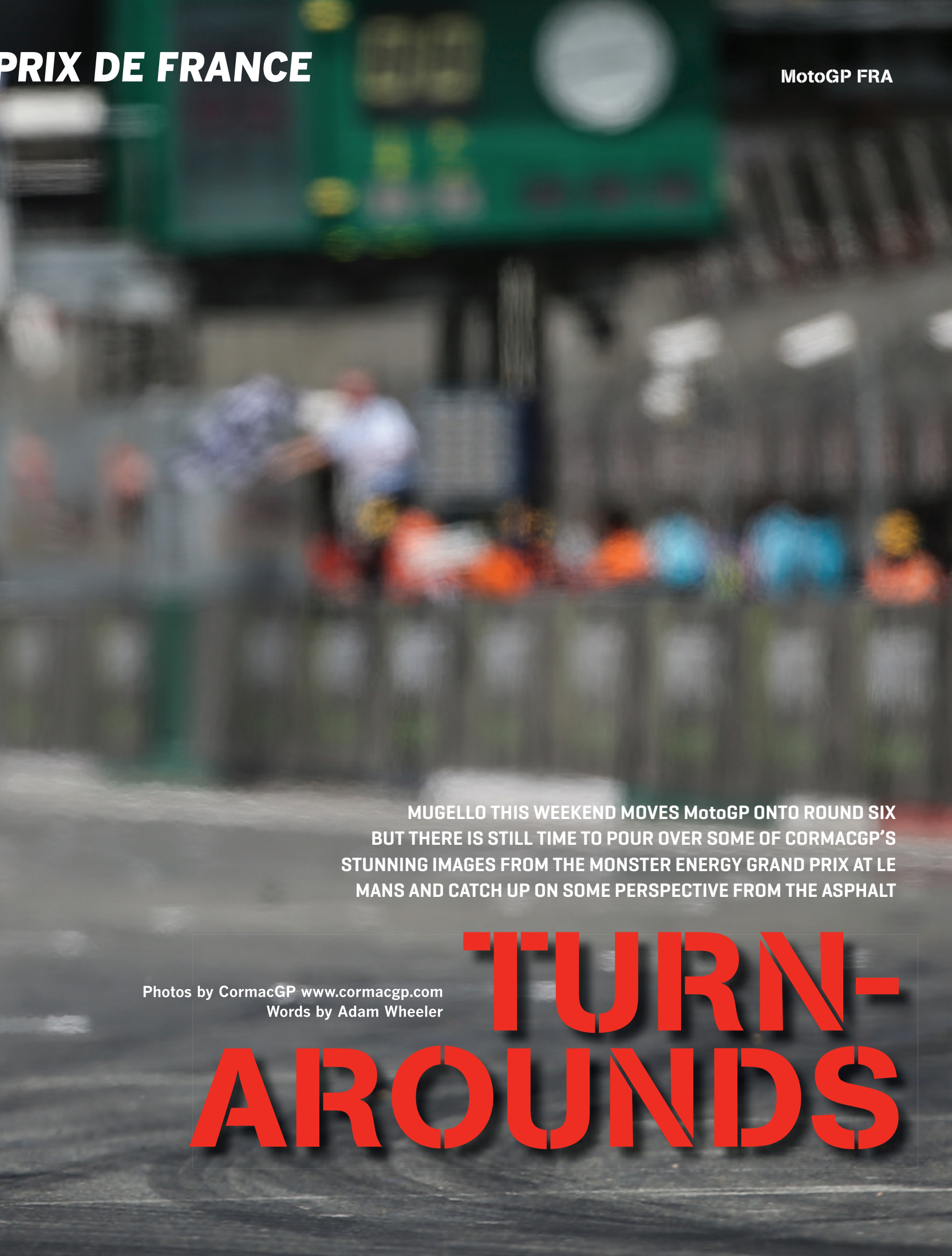


MotoGP

MONSTER ENERGY GRAND P
LE MANS · MAY 8th · Rnd 5 of 18

MotoGP winner: Jorge Lorenzo, Yamaha
Moto2 winner: Alex Rins, Kalex
Moto3 winner: Brad Binder, KTM





MUGELLO THIS WEEKEND MOVES MotoGP ONTO ROUND SIX BUT THERE IS STILL TIME TO POUR OVER SOME OF CORMACGP'S STUNNING IMAGES FROM THE MONSTER ENERGY GRAND PRIX AT LE MANS AND CATCH UP ON SOME PERSPECTIVE FROM THE ASPHALT

TURN-AROUNDS

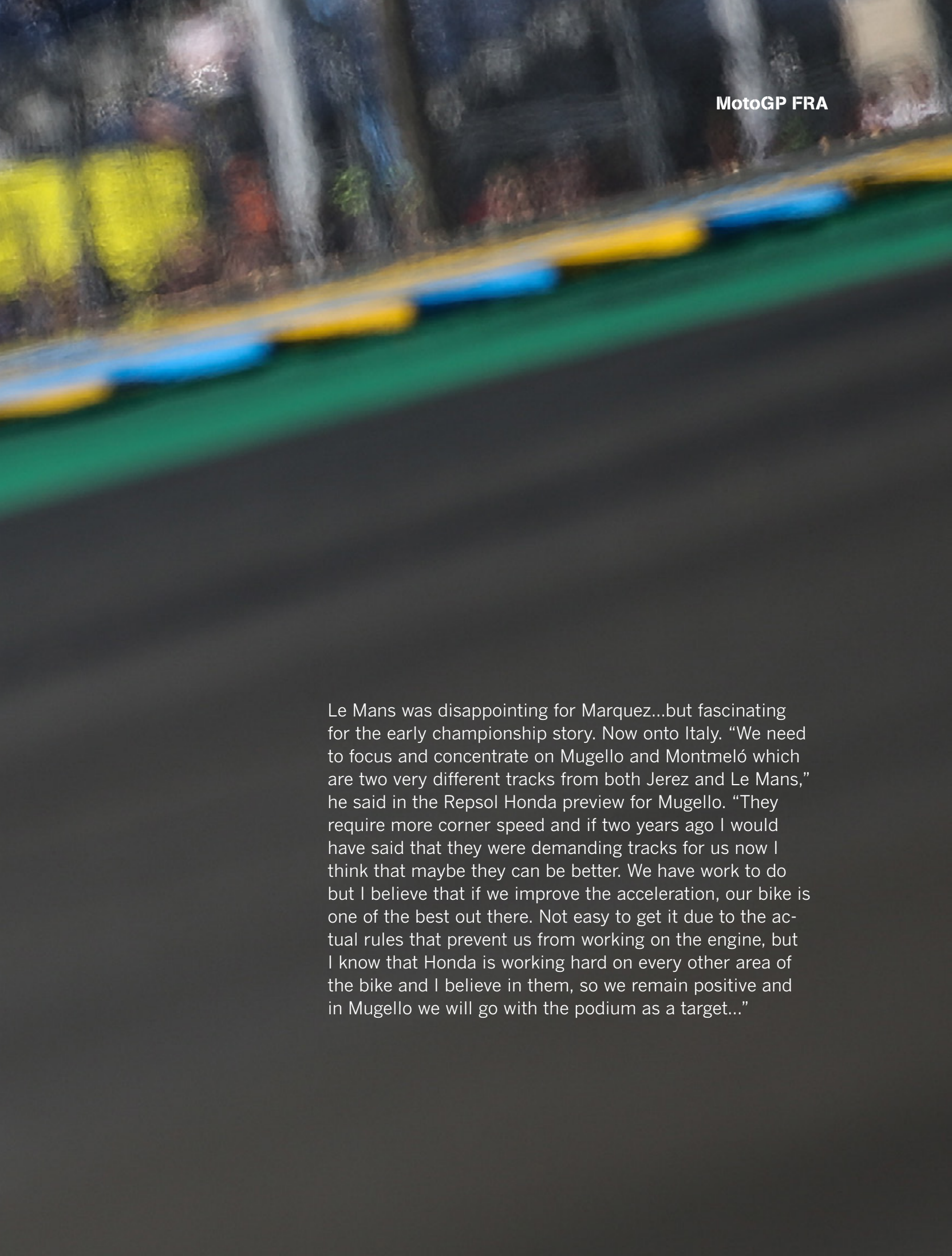
Photos by CormacGP www.cormacgp.com
Words by Adam Wheeler


44
93
99
movistar
ENEOS
YAMALUBE
YAMAHA
SHARK



Lorenzo gets out front through the first tricky chicane at Le Mans. Dovizioso is second and tellingly in front of Iannone; the No.4 would also win the decision for the second factory Ducati seat for 2017 with a new two year deal confirmed shortly before OTOR went online


REPSOL
93



Le Mans was disappointing for Marquez...but fascinating for the early championship story. Now onto Italy. “We need to focus and concentrate on Mugello and Montmeló which are two very different tracks from both Jerez and Le Mans,” he said in the Repsol Honda preview for Mugello. “They require more corner speed and if two years ago I would have said that they were demanding tracks for us now I think that maybe they can be better. We have work to do but I believe that if we improve the acceleration, our bike is one of the best out there. Not easy to get it due to the actual rules that prevent us from working on the engine, but I know that Honda is working hard on every other area of the bike and I believe in them, so we remain positive and in Mugello we will go with the podium as a target...”



Still no official word on Maverick changing his shade of blue for 2017 but the Catalan will almost certainly welcome the halt to incessant questioning about his future. Allegedly a decent relationship with Valentino Rossi was another factor in the 21 year old making his decision for the M1. Read Gavin Emmett's Blog on the next pages for another perspective... the hype around 25 continues and for good reason with Le Mans delivering his first MotoGP podium


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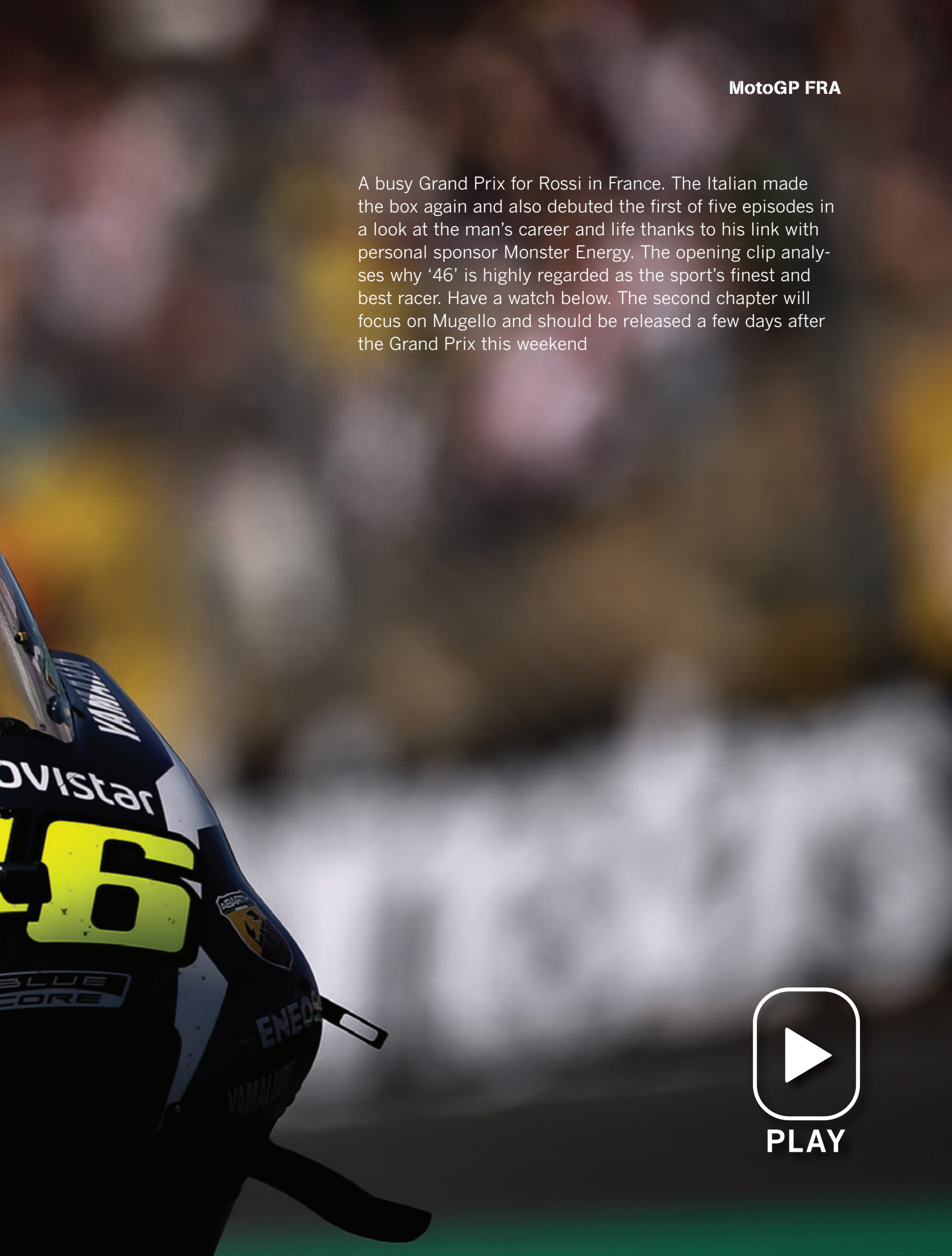


Dani Pedrosa proved that riders are not always hiding the truth when they claim in media debriefs that nothing has changed with their employment status. His new two season HRC deal means thirteen years as a factory Honda rider and his whole career with the brand; surely some kind of record there...


26
HRC
RedBull


agv
MONSTER
MICHELIN
YAMALUBE
Eurasian Bank
SNACK
PATA
YAMAHA
ENEOS
THE DOCTOR
ABARTH
YAMALUBE

A busy Grand Prix for Rossi in France. The Italian made the box again and also debuted the first of five episodes in a look at the man's career and life thanks to his link with personal sponsor Monster Energy. The opening clip analyses why '46' is highly regarded as the sport's finest and best racer. Have a watch below. The second chapter will focus on Mugello and should be released a few days after the Grand Prix this weekend




Red Bull
KTM
AVINT
27


LCR
TEAM
Honda
46



Not such stormy skies for Iannone but the future doesn't look immediately clear. Early gossip has the Italian linked with Suzuki or Aprilia and minimal options to keep his works rider status. Brad Binder (left) proved he can still win wherever he starts on the Moto3 grid. Cal Crutchlow meets some of the fans at the Bugatti circuit and making the most of the 'views' around the Monster Energy compound





MAVERICK FLYING OUT OF SUZUKI

By Gavin Emmett

It became pretty clear over the race weekend in France that Maverick Viñales would be making a move to Yamaha in 2017, despite a couple of reports to the contrary in the run up to the race weekend. They made the suggestion that Dani Pedrosa was already inked in to the seat vacated by Jorge Lorenzo alongside Valentino Rossi, however this week's confirmation of the extension to his Honda deal prove they were wide of the mark.

The French GP weekend was one of the most enjoyable I can remember, in a large part because there was glorious weather and I made it out alive every night! However, it was mainly because there was a chance to really get stuck in to some investigative stuff, and despite being a veteran of 16 years in the paddock, some things you find out never cease to amaze you. There were a couple of jaw-drops over the race weekend.

A few "off-the-record" conversations I'd love to repeat here and on BT Sport, but do that sort of thing without a couple of other solid sources and you can easily ruin your reputation, as well as get the wrong end of the stick. Some 'sources' do lie to further their own interests believe it or not (!), and because it is such a cut-throat and fickle world in a MotoGP paddock, it demonstrates why the Pedrosa story needed following up in detail.

From the conversations I had however, there was no doubt that Maverick was still keen on a move, and his representative's comments about the youngster being torn between his heart and his head were probably just a bit of seasoning chucked into the melting pot. Viñales knows he has to take this opportunity whilst it is on the table, a rider in his position may only ever get one chance to jump onto the outgoing World Champion's bike, and that's why I expect an announcement on Thursday in Mugello.

Contrary to many who have written to me on social media, I don't believe any of the delays and speculation was really about money – I'm fairly certain Mack will be earning less by moving to Yamaha. The main sticking points have been around his Suzuki contract and certain tricky get-out clauses in there. Let's not forget he effectively signed a three-year contract with the Japanese factory, with the third year allowing both sides some options, hence why he has recruited a new representative in Paco Sanchez, who is actually a contract lawyer by trade.

Some people have suggested that Lin Jarvis or Yamaha were behind the 'leak' about Pedrosa, to try and pressurise Viñales into signing quickly. Whilst I wouldn't rule it out completely, I'm not sure I believe it in this instance.

Jarvis himself has been the subject of a great deal of criticism in some quarters, particularly amongst the Spanish media corps. The accusation amongst them is that the MD of YMR only wants to sell bikes and not win championships by keeping the one half of the garage not to have won the title since 2009. The Brit has spoken glowingly about Viñales and saw him as the only person capable of replacing Lorenzo, offering a long term future for the team and sponsor. I'm not sure he or anyone at his level in Yamaha would look to derail that. Viñales could well be the masterstroke to silence those critics, as well as a renewed vigour from Rossi, but only time will tell.

This weekend's Mugello race will hopefully see the Viñales news finally put to bed and confirmed, and some reactions to the hot announcement by Ducati over duo Andrea Dovizioso and Andrea Iannone. Reports in Italy had already surfaced about Dovizioso down to remain alongside Lorenzo with Iannone on his way out – something I had heard



from a good source in France. The Italians have then gone one further by suggesting 'the Maniac' himself will be heading to Suzuki, whilst Spanish publications suggest Iannone will be joined there by Alex Rins, as the brand look to replace Viñales, and the Moto2 rider gets the factory ride he so covets.

Despite those affirmations, rumours still abound about Rins heading to Tech3 under the Yamaha factory contract Pol Espargaro currently enjoys, however I still feel that both Espargaró brothers may have something to say about the threat of losing their rides considering their recent performances. That's not to mention Johann Zarco, who is believed to already have a contract in place with Suzuki. There is another suggestion doing the rounds that the factory may still be interested in providing a third bike to one of the existing independent teams, which Zarco could run.

Back to Iannone, and some say that the 26 year-old also has an offer from Aprilia to ride alongside Sam Lowes next year. Judging by their recent form and interest in running an Italian, it's not something I would be surprised by either.

There's no doubt that this is the silliest silly-season ever, having started with Valentino Rossi's remarkable announcement at Qatar, and I am just wondering what we will do when it ends by the halfway point? We'll have to talk about the racing or something. Chance would be a fine thing.

THE R TREATMENT

**TRIUMPH THOUGHT 'REVAMP' WHEN IT CAME TO THE TI
THE NEW 'R' VERSION AIMS FOR A DISTINCTLY RACIER
FOCUS ON SPEED. ROLAND WENT FOR A BLAST ON THE
LATEST REMODELLING TO GAUGE AN OPINION ON WHET
TWEAKS WILL ENTICE A NEW GENERATION TO GET 'CAF**

By Roland Brown, Photos by Paul Barshon and Freddie Kirn



**HRUXTON AND
EDGE WITH THE
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THRUXTON
THE MAGAZINE FOR DESIGN ENTHUSIASTS




TRIUMPH



There was no doubt about which bike was the star of the show when Triumph pulled the covers off its new Bonneville family of parallel twins last October. At the top of the range of freshly liquid-cooled, retro-styled machines was the Thruxton R – a café racer with a familiar name but a distinctly different look, and a specification that marked it out as something special.

The R-model and its slightly less exotic standard sibling take a big step forward from the Thruxton that has been a success for Triumph since its launch in 2004. That bike, a mildly tweaked and bikini-faired version of the Bonneville roadster, has benefitted from the hipster-led boom in café-racers despite not really being very racy at all. The Thruxton R, on the other hand, is designed for speed as well as period style.



The revamp begins with its 1200cc parallel twin engine, which like that of the new Bonneville T120 features sohc valve design and liquid-cooling. The Thruxton's "high-power" unit is upgraded from T120 spec, with increased compression ratio and a lighter crankshaft assembly that combine to allow it to rev 500rpm higher. The result is a peak output of 96bhp at 6750rpm, 17bhp up on the Bonneville's 79bhp max. The Thruxton also gets an additional, sharper Sport engine mode in addition to the T120's Road and Rain.

Chassis layout is based on the T120's tubular steel frame but with a lighter rear subframe, steeper geometry and a 17- instead of 18-inch front wheel. The standard Thruxton follows the Bonneville in using Kayaba suspension, while the Thruxton R has more upmarket components: Showa's Big Piston Forks up front, and a similarly multi-adjustable pair of Öhlins remote-reservoir rear shocks.



The R-model also gets Brembo's four-piston Monobloc front brake calipers instead of the twin-pot Nissins that the standard Thruxton shares with the T120s. And it differs at the rear, where its exhaust is stainless steel instead of chrome, and the single seat comes with a colour-matched hump. As well as its shared pair of chrome-rimmed, alloy-mounted instruments and period-style flip-up Monza fuel cap, the R model has a polished top yoke, and a stainless steel strap stretching back along the top of its shapely fuel tank.

There's more than enough straight-line performance for serious street riding entertainment, even if the Thruxton's blend of sub-100bhp output and 220kg-plus weight means that it can't match a truly sporty modern bike. Despite its racy image the Thruxton R is pleasant to ride at low speed, partly because its clip-ons are set well above that shiny top yoke and the footrests aren't dramatically high or rear-set.

" THE THRUXTON R IS QUICK ENOUGH TO BE PLENTY OF FUN...IT BLENDS RETRO STYLE AND MODERN TECHNOLOGY TO DELIVER PERFORMANCE PLUS AN INVOLVING CHARACTER..."




THRUXTON

And the Triumph has enough top-end clout to be respectably fast in a straight line. On the R-model's launch in Portugal it rumbled to over 120mph with a bit more to come. More to the point, it sat at an indicated 90mph so smoothly and effortlessly that on a mild day it covered distance with a respectable amount of comfort.

If the Thruxton R's straight-line advantage over the rest of the Bonneville family was welcome, its chassis performance really set it apart. At 203kg it's not particularly light but its sharper geometry and more forward-biased weight distribution have transformed the handling, in conjunction with the new and lighter 17-inch front wheel.



The firmer, superior quality suspension played a big part too. On their standard settings the Big Piston Forks gave a very taut feel without being remotely harsh. And the Öhlins shocks were ideally matched, soaking up most bumps reasonably efficiently yet being sufficiently firm to make the Thruxton handle like a proper café-racer. The Pirelli Diablo Rosso Corsa tyres played their part with heaps of grip, and the Thruxton was excellent on the brakes, its blend of big discs and Brembo Monoblocs shedding speed fast with plenty of feel through the lever.

Café racers are not built to be versatile, but the Thruxton R should prove reasonably easy to live with, provided you want to ride alone. (A dual-seat and pillion pegs cost extra.) Its 14.5-litre fuel capacity isn't particularly generous but the economical motor gives a realistic range of 130 miles or more.

A USB charging socket under the seat adds a modern touch, and there's plenty of opportunity for modifications. Accessories range from a colour-matched half-fairing to Vance & Hines slip-on silencers, via rubber tank knee-pads and throw-over panniers. There's even a race kit with hotter cams, high-flow air filters and a race exhaust.

That would doubtless appeal to former Rockers or those who remember the original Thruxton Bonneville winning long-distance production races in the Sixties. But the Thruxton R is quick enough to be plenty of fun just as it is. It blends retro style and modern technology to deliver performance plus an involving character. What ever your age and riding style, that's quite a combination.




THRUXTON R




TRIUMPH


THRUXTON R

BackPage

Monster Energy Girls
By Ray Archer











'On-track Off-road' is a free, bi-weekly publication for the screen focussed on bringing the latest perspectives on events, blogs and some of the very finest photography from the three worlds of the FIM Motocross World Championship, the AMA Motocross and Supercross series' and MotoGP.
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Adam Wheeler Editor and MXGP/MotoGP correspondent
Ray Archer Photographer
Steve Matthes AMA MX and SX correspondent
Cormac Ryan-Meenan MotoGP Photographer www.cormacgp.com
Simon Cudby AMA SX/MXPhotographer
Matthew Roberts Television Presenter and WSB correspondent
Gavin Emmett TV commentator/Presenter and MotoGP Reporter
Núria Garcia Cover Design
Gabi Álvarez Web developer
Hosting FireThumb7 - www.firethumb7.co.uk

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